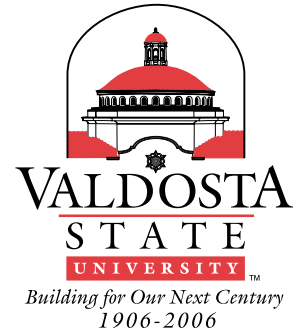


PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Fall 2006

Ronald M. Zaccari

A very busy and historic fall semester is in full operation with students arriving from 46 states and 63 countries.

The University opened a new academic year by celebrating its Centennial with three days of community-wide events, August 17-19, 2006. The Centennial Steering Committee and hundreds of volunteers helped make each event a success. I invite you to join me throughout the Centennial Years (2006-2013) and enjoy more events and opportunities to showcase VSU's accomplishments and future visionary plans.

On August 7, the annual Fall Convocation officially opened the 2006-2007 academic year. This year's theme, "Higher Education at the Crossroads," called attention to a number of important national and state issues that will have immediate impact on Valdosta State University. Our campus must be ready to respond with understanding, candid dialogue, and accurate data. Accountability will be crucial, and we must continue to build a comprehensive system of performance measures, coupled with key indicators of success that will vividly demonstrate our effectiveness and return on investment.

An update follows on many of the initiatives in progress during this semester.

Strategic Planning Retreat

On July 24-25, 2006, VSU conducted a planning retreat to revise its 2002 strategic goals. That retreat included 50 participants representing the Faculty Senate, the Council on Staff Affairs, the Student Government Association, all members of the Deans' Council, and the President's Cabinet. This group streamlined the University's 2002-2003 Strategic Plan from eight goals to five with corresponding action steps that the campus hopes to accomplish during the next five years. The revised goals are as follows:

- **Enrollment and Retention:** Intentionally grow undergraduate and graduate enrollment (reaching 12,000 in the next five years) through additional new students and increased retention and graduation rates of existing students.
- **Diversity:** Move beyond tolerance by actively promoting acceptance, inclusion, appreciation, and respect for human similarities and differences.
- **Academic Programs:** Develop programs in health-related professions, while continuing to offer, identify, and develop programs which prepare students to be responsible, thoughtful, and productive citizens.
- **Faculty and Staff Development:** Enhance employment excellence and identify best practices in developing and retaining quality faculty and staff.
- **Financial Support:** Establish the infrastructure and process to increase sponsored research and private gifts as a percentage of the total budget; position VSU to enhance the achievement of its mission.

The refined strategic plan has been communicated campus-wide through email announcements, the planning website, and presentations at various departmental meetings. Retreat participants and members of the University Council have been encouraged to share their retreat experiences and resulting plan with their colleagues.

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Dr. Christine Coons Yates, of Organizational Development and Strategic Planning, has visited various campus divisions and academic units, providing additional information as well as an opportunity for faculty and staff to engage further in the planning process by addressing questions in departmental meetings.

In the past year VSU's web-based planning system has continued to evolve and is a valuable resource for the Budget Advisory Council and the University Council. The strategic planning database has been restructured to incorporate planning goals and to request additional funds for implementation. It also is a vital tool for tracking the progress of goals and for providing accountability for their completion.

VSU's strategic planning goals are aligned with the University System of Georgia's goals. These goals drive our decision-making and budgeting process, supporting the University's position that initiative funding requests are clearly tied to institutional goals.

The strategic planning process allows campus divisions and departments to think creatively about how they use current resources before seeking additional funds through the Budget Advisory Council (BAC). The BAC then utilizes a ranking system to evaluate each request and prioritize funding. Using this process, in FY06, the University funded 50 one-time initiatives worth approximately \$2,391,000.

VSU is actively committed to strategic planning. Higher education continues to evolve at a dramatic pace, involving numerous external and often mandated forces that simultaneously converge on our campus. National and state trends affect our daily operations and short- and long-term planning and serve as a continual reminder that every VSU employee must participate in selected outcomes.

We are navigating through challenging times; thus, VSU cannot be content with past successes. We must adjust to create the future. Additionally, we must continue to focus on our strategic goals and allocate our scarce financial resources to those areas that will have the greatest positive impact on the University's regional mission.

This process means there will be sacrifices and hard decisions, and VSU must adopt a culture of change to reach the referenced five strategic goals and to adjust to national and state higher education trends. I urge each division and department to incorporate individual-unit goals and initiatives that support the University's five major goals. Each goal requires measurable outcomes to succeed, and timelines and quantitative measures must be established.

Economic Impact

Legislators signed the state charter establishing a normal college in South Georgia in 1906. In 1913, three fulltime and 15 part-time freshmen began their college career at South Georgia State Normal College. Today, enrollment is nearing 11,000, and VSU offers 56 undergraduate and 46 graduate degree majors. VSU's annual economic impact within its geographic region has reached \$332 million.

This economic impact represents a tremendous responsibility for VSU and the University System of Georgia. We must be concerned with the quality of our education system, while expanding access and opportunities for a greater number of students to enter post-secondary education. In addition, we must continue to build partnerships within our business community, and provide professional employment options in South Georgia.

Salary Studies

In response to one of Valdosta State University's strategic goals (recruit and retain quality faculty and staff), two separate salary studies have been initiated. The Faculty Salary Study, conducted internally by VSU's office of Strategic Research and Analysis, has been completed. The Classified Staff Salary Study, conducted by MGT of America and VSU's department of Human Resources, is scheduled for completion in early December 2006.

The Faculty Salary Study is a statistically sound, research-based model that considers salaries across the University's five colleges and disciplines and national peer institutions. This model creates a salary database with comparative information that can be updated annually. The first component of the study involved a comprehensive analysis of salary studies conducted by nationally known researchers. From this data, VSU developed a model that incorporates three components, each representing three distinct perspectives from which to examine faculty salaries: (1) external market averages based on average salaries by rank and disciplines at 103 peer institutions nationwide; (2) internal equity; and (3) compression.

The Faculty Salary Study includes all full-time faculty members at the ranks of professor, associate professor, assistant professor, and instructor, who were employed at VSU during the 2005-2006 academic year. We have identified the faculty members at VSU who are below the external market average for their rank and discipline, and we have developed a phased plan to bring all fulltime faculty salaries to the peer average. The first step is to bring all faculty members to at least 85% of the peer average and address internal equity.

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The two salary studies support a firm commitment from the President's office to begin a systematic phase-in process of salary adjustments. The process will rely on an annual infusion of strategic initiative funds and represents the sequential steps necessary to support faculty and staff salaries. It's a beginning and I ask for your support as we phase in salary adjustments over the next three years.

In Spring 2006, VSU contracted with MGT of America to utilize the current University System of Georgia BCAT classification system to develop a compensation philosophy for non-faculty benefited positions. MGT is assisting VSU in creating up-to-date job descriptions, collecting information to support classification and market comparisons for each position, and creating a salary structure to reflect appropriate market comparisons.

During July and August, all non-faculty benefited employees were given the opportunity to complete a Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ), which will ultimately provide job descriptions for all staff positions. Sixty-seven percent of non-faculty benefited employees completed all four portions of the questionnaire. Using this information, MGT will generate the first draft of position descriptions for those who completed the survey. MGT continues to work on the wage and salary comparison, using the information generated from the JCQ. Preliminary results on the JCQ and wage and salary comparison will be released January 2007.

Once we have ascertained the financial impact of both the Faculty and Classified Staff salary studies, we hope to implement phase one of the adjustments. I have requested \$300,000 from the 2008 strategic planning initiatives to supplement compensation adjustments for employees identified through both studies. Advancements in salary adjustments will be phased in through a systematic and progressive timeline. Those timelines will be determined when faculty and staff salary data are delivered in January 2007.

Historic Preservation and Parking Study

Last year, I convened a group of individuals from the local neighborhood association, the Valdosta City Council, the Lowndes County Historical Society, the South Georgia Regional Development Center, and University Administrators. The group was charged with developing the University's first campus historic preservation plan to optimize the use of University land and facilities in relationship to the surrounding neighborhoods.

The firm of Lord, Aeck, and Sargent (LAS) was hired, and the study was expanded to include parking. The study has two primary objectives: (1) to identify facilities and properties within reference districts that meet the specific definition of historic preservation and; (2) to review VSU's current parking system and related needs, leading to recommendations for the possible location as well as the design of VSU's first multi-level parking facility.

The historical portion of the study contains valuable information for consideration as we continue to expand and protect the historical fabric of the neighborhoods and University.

North Campus Expansion

Architects from Heery International, an Atlanta based firm, along with local architects Ellis, Rickett and Associates have begun the pre-planning phase of the \$43 million Health Sciences and Business Administration building. Located on 12 acres at VSU's Rea and Lillian Steele North Campus, and adjacent to South Georgia Medical Center, the new Health Sciences and Business Administration facility will include the Langdale College of Business Administration, the College of Nursing, the Division of Social Work, Marriage and Family Therapy, Communication Disorders, Sports Medicine and Athletic Training, and Exercise Physiology.

Heery International is also developing a sector plan that will examine all aspects the North Campus project and how to unite the Health Sciences and Business Administration facility with student housing, food services, and parking. In addition, MGT of America is conducting a market study to ascertain the number of beds needed on North Campus, in addition to future residence halls on main campus. This market study will provide updated information that will coordinate with VSU's accepted 10-year Master Plan.

Student Union

With current enrollment quickly approaching 11,000 and conservative projected increases between two to four percent annually, VSU needs additional student-centered space. The current Student Union, constructed in the mid 1960s, includes 34,500 square feet of space. The Association of College-Unions International and the Council for the Advancement of Standards recommends a reference point of 10 square feet of gross space for each student enrolled as well as projected enrollment outlined in VSU's Master Plan. The proposed Student Union is expected to contain 137,363 gross square feet.

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VSU students strongly support the Student Union project. An approved \$80 per semester student fee will finance the project. The Student Union committee, consisting of student leaders, faculty, and various campus stakeholders, has worked diligently for the past two years, discussing facility location and campus needs, conducting site visits to peer institutions, and soliciting input campus-wide.

The firm of Lord, Aeck, and Sargent (LAS) was hired to assist the committee with pre-design and feasibility studies. On September 6, 2006, LAS presented five pre-design concepts for the committee to review. Each design considered numerous current and future requirements and location options. These location options varied from partial demolition of the current Student Union and Gymnasium to full demolition of both facilities.

The committee charged LAS to look at two of the concepts and explore a variety of issues, including vehicular access and pedestrian flow. LAS will also examine the feasibility of using Hopper Hall for student activities and offices during the two-year construction of the new Student Union, pending the replacement of Hopper's 200 beds to another location. The new Hopper Hall will contain 600 beds and support much needed new student housing in the heart of the campus.

Customer Service Initiative

Governor Sonny Perdue's new "Customer Service Improvement Initiative" in which all state agencies have united in an effort to make Georgia the best-managed state in the country, places a heightened emphasis on customer service. Chancellor Erroll B. Davis, Jr. is asking all the University System of Georgia's 38,000 employees to provide faster, friendlier, more efficient service to the USG's "customers," which include more than 253,500 students.

VSU is currently updating its Partners for Campus Excellence (PFCE) training material, re-establishing a PFCE taskforce, and working to improve how it measures, reinforces, and recognizes excellent service. VSU's PFCE has been in place since 2001, and 96% of all campus departments participated in the first phase of training. PFCE classes continue to be offered at least once per semester for new employees. Through the PFCE, the "I Caught You Caring" program was implemented and more than 1,200 employees have been recognized for their excellent service. The PFCE training format is designed to stimulate discussion on how to build a service culture. Many ideas and actions steps from these classes and have been implemented, including enhancing internal and external building signage; creating consistent employee identification through name tags and office name plates; introducing living/learning communities; providing access to more online forms; implementing the Advisor of the Year award as well as providing more support materials for advisors; strengthening internal communication through departmental and cross departmental meetings; and improving the campus directory format.

We will continue to work to achieve the Governor's Initiative to become Faster, Friendlier, and Easier, which means meeting the Governor's Service Standards: own the customer's issue; greet customers promptly and courteously; listen to customers with respect, politeness, and focus; and honor our commitments in a timely manner.

Initially, VSU will focus on measuring the effectiveness of campus telephone interactions and on implementing a new web page design. You can learn more about the USG Customer Service Initiative by going to this Web site: www.customerfocus.usg.edu.

University System of Georgia Enhanced Advising Process Team

Chancellor Erroll Davis, Jr., requested that I lead a team to examine student advising at University System of Georgia (USG) institutions. The Enhanced Advising Process Team will examine current USG programs and standards, including effective advising for transfer students and links to the System's Retention-Progression-Graduation initiative. Members of the Enhanced Advising Process Team will include representatives from all sectors of the University System of Georgia. The team will also seek additional input from state and national higher education professionals and organizations.

All students participate in academic advising during their college career, and this advising has a direct impact on improved graduation and retention rates, especially in helping students graduate in a timely manner. For a student to have a successful higher education experience, positive and proficient academic advising is crucial. Progressive institutions of higher education realize that a productive academic advising program embraces shared responsibility between student and adviser and includes elements of effective student orientation and career development throughout a student's college experience.